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ABSTRACT

The existing methods for the teaching of literature in colleges and universities in India are summarized with reference to the aims of such programs. Lectures, tutorials, and seminars do not promote the learning of literature or critical thinking because teachers are not adequately prepared to be specialists in different periods or styles of literature and students do not work independently. The "Practical Criticism" method wherein students read on their own and discuss together with the teacher only interjecting corrections, and the "Peripatetic Method" of the ancient Lyceum are favored. Group discussions, workshops, and seminars will promote the development of critical thinking. Those involved in setting course materials must follow the same careful procedures for selection, grading, and presentation as are followed in language instruction. (PMJ)

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THE QUESTION OF METHODOLOGY IN THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE

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1. The Aim

Literature of one language or another is a subject that has been taught at colleges and universities for a very long time. It is, indeed, one of the most important humanistic disciplines. As the teaching of a subject implies some classroom method of presentation, those who teach literature employ one method or another in teaching different branches of it. Whether these methods accord with the nature of the task and help develop in the students the right kind of literary sensibility and taste, and also a mature critical sense is a question that has rarely been asked. Whatever is the method, it has to be justified with reference to the nature of the subject for which it is employed. In fact, the question of methodology can be raised about the teaching of any subject, but the important thing, before any discussion starts, is to identify the nature of the subject, and the aims that are to be pursued in the teaching of it. It is necessary to do so to obviate the danger of a methodology that suits a particular subject being applied to the teaching of another. It is all the more necessary for literature, as it is, in many respects, unlike other subjects.

The main aim of teaching literature, as I see it, is to develop (1) the literary sensibility and taste of a student through constant exposure to literary works of different types, and (2) to develop his critical sense, so that he may read literary works with sufficient relish and insight, and interpret and evaluate them properly. For the sake of evaluation the aim is to help him evolve a mature set of criteria by which he may properly judge and evaluate any literary work that he reads. In his sketch for an English school, F.R. Leavis defines the aim slightly differently. He describes literature as a literary-critical discipline which "trains, in a way no other discipline can, intelligence and sensibility together cultivating a sensitiveness and precision of response and delicate integrity of intelligence, intelligence that integrates as well as analyses

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and must have pertinacity and staying power as well as delicacy."¹ Later, in the same book, Leavis states the aim more succinctly as the development of "a trained sense of value in the intelligent reading of literature."² He doubts whether such an aim can be achieved by practical criticism merely of short poems and odds and ends, which was very much in vogue at the time he wrote this. He, however, believes that this kind of criticism can develop into "the completest kind of interpretive and evaluative criticism."

Whereas some other critics emphasize 'taste', and regard 'the correction of taste' as one of the major aims of reading and teaching literature, Leavis all along emphasizes the training of intelligence and sensibility. He believes that the process of evaluative judgment, which requires a trained intelligence, is no mere matter of 'taste' that can be set over against it. To him "a discipline of thought that is at the same time a discipline in scrupulous sensitiveness of response to delicate organization of feeling, sensation and imagery" is the real aim. But it does not seem to be inconsistent with the aim of developing a good taste. In practice, more often, the good taste of a mature reader offers a norm for literary judgment as T.S. Eliot thinks, was true of Remy de Gourmont, whose personal impressions served as laws to others.

The focus changes slightly when one looks at what I. A. Richards and Empson define as the principal aim of reading literary works. They think that a literary work has an organic structure whose parts are intricately related to each other. The totality of meaning in such a work is operative on several levels at the same time. The chief task of criticism is therefore to make explicit to the reader the implicit manifold of meanings in it. If we look at it from this angle, the aim of teaching literature would appear to be to develop in a student a critical insight that may enable him to perceive the whole complex organization of a literary work. This may also enable him to judge how literary works differ in respect of complexity of organisation and meaning.

This is precisely the formalist position in terms of which a literary work is viewed as a manifoldly organized complex of structures, or a stratified system having various layers of strata within it. The structuralist position of treating a work of art as "a system of systems" is also not much different. To a formalist, great works have multivalence and an aesthetic value that is "so rich and comprehensive as to include among its structures one or more which gives high satisfaction to each later period."³ These valuable qualities and relationships may be present there

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only for a competent reader. They have to be realized and experienced by whosoever has the necessary intelligence, sensibility and taste. It is an aesthetic experience which depends on a great deal of emotional, intellectual and aesthetic maturity. One of the aims of teaching literature then is to help a student acquire that maturity.

What is required is a close and insightful reading of literary works. A close reading or analysis of a literary work, stressed greatly by the New Critics, is sometimes misunderstood as something in the nature of 'murdering to dissect', but it is, in fact, the process, as Leavis says, "by which we seek to attain a complete reading of the poem" (or of any other kind of literary work). Leavis calls it "a constructive or creative process" or "a recreation in which, by a considerable attentiveness, we assume a more than ordinary faithfulness and completeness."⁴ Analysis is, to T. S. Eliot, one of the chief tools of criticism, and while teaching literature the aim has therefore to be to equip the student with proper techniques of analysis. The other chief tool of criticism that T. S. Eliot emphasizes, is comparison with other literary works of a similar type. That is also equally essential for a proper appraisal of an author or any of his works. For this a student needs to develop a historical sense by which he may clearly perceive the relationship of a particular work of art with others within its own tradition and outside it. By this he may arrive at a mature judgment on it, keeping both the factors of tradition and the individual talent in mind.⁵

Now the question is: what is the proper method for achieving all these aims that we have mentioned above in a classroom, or, are the existing methods enough to help a teacher at different levels, and with different branches of literature? Before we try to answer such questions, it is better to consider the rationale for method.

2. The Rationale for Method

The first question that arises is why we need a method at all for teaching literature, or for any other subject. The only justification for a method is obviously that it helps us learn something better. In other words, it helps the teacher create the necessary conditions for certain learning processes to take place. We could employ this criterion to judge the efficacy of any method, and also to evaluate different methods proposed for teaching literature. If we consider language teaching, this has, in fact, been the only valid criterion for judging a method. In view of this, the only rationale for any new methods for teaching literature would be whether they help a

teacher fulfil better all the different aims of teaching literature that we have mentioned above. As the aims are varied in nature, the methods to fulfil them have obviously to be varied. But the crucial thing is whether there is an objective procedure for judging the efficacy of different methods, and for selecting some and rejecting others. Can we test them experimentally by treating a particular teaching method as a dependent variable, and all other factors in the teaching situation such as the learners, classroom conditions, materials, etc., as independent variables? Pit Corder suggests this for testing a language teaching method.⁶ Some sort of measurement is obviously necessary for this. We cannot test the adequacy of any method of teaching literature unless we can measure the learner's competence in interpreting and judging literature both at the beginning and at the end of a course, and thereby measure the greater or lesser efficacy of a method. This at once raises a number of questions. The most crucial question is whether there is any valid method of measuring one's knowledge and understanding of literature. Is it possible to control factors like intelligence, sensibility, experience and motivation of the learners and have two sets of learners matched equally in these respects for any two methods to be tested? Is any homogeneity possible even within one set? Besides, is it possible to have two teachers using different methods, matched in respect of personality, sensibility, experience, scholarship, etc.? Even if the same teacher were to test two different methods, his personal conviction regarding the adequacy of one method or the other is likely to vitiate the experiment. These difficulties discourage people so much that the question of methodology is ever hardly discussed for teaching literature. Whenever it is discussed it is treated mostly as a matter of individual preference. Many argue that what matters in the teaching of literature is intelligence, experience and scholarship on the part of the teacher, and proper motivation, literary sensibility and intelligence on the part of the learner. Everything else, they say, is of little consequence. Granted these minimum conditions, it is believed any method will work. This line of approach straightaway dismisses all discussion about methodology in relation to the teaching of literature as irrelevant. One need not subscribe to this view, but in that case one will have to show clearly how such a discussion is fruitful, and how one method pays better than another in teaching literature. A related question is what method will suit what stage, as one may not like to advocate the same method for different stages varying in several respects.

3. The Current Methods

Different methods are employed at our universities for teaching literature today. The most well-known is the Lecture Method. While adopting

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this method one probably assumes literature to be like any other discipline under Humanities or Social Sciences where all that is required for teaching it is a clever exposition of it by a learned teacher. As a teacher of History can teach History, a teacher of Literature can very well do the same, whatever he may have to teach, a topic in literary theory, a poem, a play, or a novel. One may not have to go far to find teachers of literature reading out a long poem day after day to the class, and giving a running commentary on that, or moving backwards and forwards through a play or a novel while teaching that, and giving their personal impressions about it. This may be a very stimulating exercise for the teacher, but it is not always equally stimulating for the student who has to listen to one lecture after another from morning till afternoon. Some conscientious teachers do ask a student to read the text at home before coming to the classroom, but few students take that advice seriously. They rarely treat it as something urgent, as they know well that all the contribution they will be expected to make in the classroom will be just to listen. The usual habit of students in such a situation is to postpone the reading of the text until after the teacher has discussed it, or even until a little before the examination. Lectures go on till about two weeks before the examination, and the only occasion that a student can have to discuss anything with the teacher is during the course of the lecture. But, apart from the interruption which some teachers and students do not like, that does not allow much time for any useful discussion. The only way to discuss anything, then, is by private appointment with the teacher, but a private appointment has its own difficulties. One does not know how many teachers really like it, and are easily available for it, if there are frequent requests and by several students at the same time.

Although the lecture method does not provide any scope for discussion and a joint exploration of the subject, it still has its own champions. Geoffrey Bullough considers it one of the best in the world. He says:

"In the long-established, vigorous French method of 'Lecture expliqee' the first reading of a short piece is followed by critical analysis. This may systematically consider the language form, and content of the passage, its ideas and emotional impact, its relationship to other work by the author and its place in the history of literature. Compared with this highly-wrought technique, the looser English Practical criticism of the Cambridge School may seem a chancy, even slipshod way. As commonly used, 'the lecture expliqee' relies perhaps more on analysis than synthesis; it pays great attention to circumstantial and intellectual features and makes a

keen-edged tool for the critic who loves to classify and pigeonhole. Little escapes its wiry mesh, except sometimes (I am told) the soul of the poem. But in the hands of a sensitive teacher the method is one of the best in the world."⁷

The pertinent question to ask is: for whom is the 'Lecture expliquee' the best method? For the teacher or for the student? For the teacher it may be the best method, as it gives him a clear opportunity to exhibit his critical skill and scholarship. Bullough rightly calls it a keen-edged tool for the critic who loves to classify and pigeonhole, and, may be, to interpret, but the question is whether it is the best method for the student who may not like to buy a readymade interpretation of anything, howsoever profound, but may like to learn how a poem, or a play should be read, examined critically, and interpreted. This alone can help him in reading and appreciating literary works later independently. I do not know how even a sensitive teacher can provide this training by 'Lecture expliquee' unless he limits his lectures and treats them as a few demonstration lessons in literary analysis before practical training in literary analysis and criticism starts. Lectures will then be only one of the means to develop the critical ability of the students. They will be more useful if they follow Eliot's model of extension lecturing.⁸ What is crucial is to make the students do the thing, and not just let them sit as passive observers of a clever teacher's feats of literary scholarship.

Having realized that the lecture method allows little scope for any fruitful discussion, and learner participation in the process of learning, various universities have tried to compensate for that by supplementing it with a few tutorials. The class is divided into small groups, and each group is assigned to a teacher who is supposed to help it with everything in the syllabus. But this may sometimes require a Middle English specialist to interpret passages from Yeats and Eliot, and to guide a student about them, or a specialist in modern fiction to solve problems in Shakespeare. Under the tutorial system, as it exists today, every tutor is ideally supposed to know everything, and to remove any kind of difficulty experienced by a student. As the system cannot obviously work this way, tutorials mostly end up as chatting sessions when a tutor tries by all means to cover up his ignorance about many things, and talks either about the things he knows best or about some general matters. Many teachers do not even take them seriously. The student does not still get much opportunity to discuss anything, and to learn literary interpretation and evaluation from any practical work. He then falls back on the library, and goes about frantically reading

one critic after another, taking down copious notes from them. He couples these notes with the lecture notes that he keeps taking down regularly, and this is what he reads everyday for his examination. He may or may not yet read the text carefully. That does not seem to him important enough under the present mode of examination. If he can somehow prepare answers to a few select questions by consulting some eminent critics, and quote a number of critical opinions on a given theme, he may hope to pass, or even get a good grade sometimes. The sad result is that he gets a degree in literature, but still cannot analyse any literary work intelligently, and interpret or evaluate it properly. As he is all along denied the opportunity for discussion and independent exploration, and as he manages to pass by means of secondary sources, his critical ability remains so undeveloped that he cannot form independent judgment on any literary work. Sometimes he has to suffer for this even in the examination at the hands of those examiners who value even a little judgment of one's own far more than a heap of critical opinions from secondary sources. If one looks up the examination scripts these days, one rarely finds an original comment or an independent argument on anything. For critical appreciation of a poem, one is likely to find a mere paraphrase of the poem with quotations from some major critics which sometimes do not properly connect with one another. This tendency is encouraged all the more by some cheap bazaar notes and guides. But can we blame the students for this? This is perhaps the natural outcome of the methods that we employ in teaching literature. They do not develop in the students the habit of independent thinking and critical judgment. One will feel quite dismayed to find now that many students of literature do not even know that one requires a set of values to judge any literary work, and that one cannot just borrow them from anywhere; they have to be deep-rooted in one's sensibility and taste.

To remedy this situation, a further change has been introduced by some universities. It is not merely through lectures that everything is taught now, but a few seminars are also held every week. Still, much less time is assigned to seminars than to lectures. They are held once or twice a week by rotation for each subject, with the result that any subject or author hardly gets one seminar in a month. Anyway, there surely the students get some chance to discuss their problems, but these seminars still suffer from two major drawbacks: (1) They often remain as formal as lectures—the initiation of the discussion is sometimes an hour long, as long as a lecture. The informal atmosphere conducive to a fruitful group discussion is found sadly lacking there, (2) Eager students do not still get enough time to discuss all that they want to, while the shy ones are just left alone. So,

seminars of the kind we have do not really improve the situation very much.

While all these things have been going on, suddenly a new wave has come from the West, especially from Cambridge, where under the leadership of I.A. Richards and Empson poetry had been taught by altogether different techniques. Richards did not like to give lectures on poems, but, on the contrary, he encouraged his students to read a poem carefully and give their own interpretations of it. Each member of the class thus made his own contribution to the reading of the poem, and through such collective effort the poem was interpreted. The teacher only monitored the discussion by putting in a corrective here and a comment there. This procedure of criticism is called 'Practical Criticism' which very much resembles a workshop method. One great virtue of this method is that it encourages independent thinking, and compels every member of the group to take part in the discussion. When I.A. Richards started with this at Cambridge, he found that his students showed crass misunderstanding while interpreting and evaluating simple verse - and prose - pieces, but his analysis of errors proved quite profitable to him as well as to his students. This gave an opportunity to him—and this will always provide a rich opportunity to other teachers as well—to correct the readings of his students, and thus to teach them the art of literary interpretation and evaluation by actually making them do the job under careful supervision. Richards did not merely influence teachers and teaching methods, but also many critics who were developing independent techniques of literary analysis and were raising the banner of formalist criticism high. These critics are known as the 'New Critics.' Their main concern is analysis of the formal properties of a literary work. They repudiate all kinds of extrinsic approaches to the study of literature, and emphasize a close reading of every literary work with a view to discovering the internal relationships among different elements that constitute it, and thereby perceiving its total design and meaning. This approach has considerably influenced many teachers of English also. They therefore find the method of practical criticism quite useful, as it is conducive to this mode of analysis far more than any other method. It is applicable not merely to the teaching of poetry but also to that of fiction, as P.P. Sharma has rightly remarked :

"A novel, like any other work of literature, is best taught through a student-oriented programme in which students are encouraged to participate in discussion. For this the world has yet to discover anything more effective than the Peripatetic Method used by the ancient philosopher in the Lyceum.

Asking the right kind of questions is of the very essence here. The questions asked may give the impression of having been improvised on the spur of the moment and fired like random sallies; actually they are the fruit of hard labour on the part of the conscientious teacher. Such a teacher prepares a lesson plan focussing on what questions he will ask at what point and in what sequence. Unless he has his own comments organized in his mind—almost with as meticulous care as he would normally exercise in building up an essay—his unrelated and ad hoc questions have little chance of leading his students (some of them floundering and groping) to a balanced and integrated interpretation. A good class, it has been well remarked, “should end in a firm understanding of the material, not just by the ringing of a bell.”⁹

The Peripatetic Method outlined above is quite similar to the Practical Criticism Method, as both are student-oriented methods which aim to develop a critical ability in the students through discussion. It is essentially the analytic method which can develop continuously, as Leavis suggests, from shorter to bigger works.

We have not yet pronounced any final judgment. After giving a short account of the existing methods, we are still asking which method creates the best conditions for the learning processes to take place, and for developing a mature critical competence for interpreting and judging literary works. Before reaching any final decision in this matter, we would like to reconsider the question of method, and see whether techniques of presentation alone constitute method.

4. The Meaning of Method

As we have already pointed out, there are different approaches to the question of method in language teaching. Looking at it from the angle of teaching materials, we may have a method like the Grammar-Translation Method, the Structural Method and so on, but looking at it from the angle of the medium to be used, we may have a different set of methods like the Direct Method, the Bilingual Method, etc. Similarly, there could be several other methods based on different factors, such as the Indirect Method, the Aural-Oral Method, the Film Method, the Situational Method, the Basic Method, the Cognitive Method and so on. But as Mackey points out, all these methods “limit themselves to a single aspect of a complex subject, inferring that that aspect alone is all that matters.”¹⁰ Mackey believes that method includes what all teaching includes; that is, some sort of ‘selection,’ some sort of ‘grading,’ and some sort of ‘presentation.’ We need selection

just because it is impossible to teach the whole of a subject, whether it is a language or its literature. We are forced to select that part of it which we wish to teach. Then comes grading, because it is impossible to teach all that we have selected at the same time. We have to put something before, or after something else, and properly sequence the units that have to be taught. After that we need to present all that by means of suitable classroom teaching materials, and by different classroom techniques. Presentation is necessary, as it is impossible to teach without communicating. Mackey has left out testing, which could as well have been included in the definition of method, as it controls all the three factors mentioned by measuring their efficacy in a particular situation.

4. 1. Selection

Now applying all that is said by Mackey about method to the teaching of literature, we can see that there is as much need to select what we wish to teach in literature at a particular stage as in teaching a language. We can have a whole paper on Shakespeare, and the whole of *Paradise Lost*, probably, at the post-graduate level, but we cannot do so at the under-graduate level. We will have to restrict ourselves to sampling and selecting whatever is representative of a particular author or a period or a genre for that level. Even at the post-graduate level, sampling and selection are necessary, as we cannot prescribe the complete works of every major poet, novelist or dramatist. They are, therefore, the most vital factors for designing any useful course in literature. They have to take into full consideration the learner's level. Leavis has that in mind when he says with reference to advanced studies: "The induction into such advanced work clearly demands a most delicate tact on the part of the guide, and there are considerations to be borne in mind regarding the immaturity and inexperience of under-graduates."¹¹

A course designer has to determine exactly how much of poetry, drama, fiction, literary theory etc. needs to be taught at a particular stage. But any selection has to be governed by some principle, as different things selected at different stages have to have some connection with one another, and the whole sequence has to be justified on some grounds. The content of a course is a serious problem, as people suggest varied kinds of things for a literature course at different stages. Some like to select the texts to be studied on the basis of genre, while others on that of age. Similarity of texts, in one respect or another, is obviously the criterion here. As some feel that it is easier to grasp them if they are selected on the basis of age, they recommend this criterion to be followed at the under-graduate level. They believe that concrete features of a socio-cultural milieu are easier to grasp than the abstract features of a

literary genre. One other criterion of selection suggested by others is with reference to the world-view of the authors to be prescribed. It is suggested that at the under-graduate level only those works should be selected whose world-view has more in common with that of the students. It is felt that they will be in a better position to understand and appreciate such works. At a higher stage, of course, works with differing world-views could be introduced, as with greater maturity and experience the students will be able to realize that a shared world-view, or the factor of belief, does not play any significant role in literary interpretation and evaluation.

Talking specifically of English Literature, some suggest that a course in it should also include American, Australian, Canadian and Commonwealth literatures. One other suggestion in the Indian context is: "until we have our own translations of world classics in our languages in large numbers, we shall also have to study Greek, Roman, French, German, Italian and Scandinavian classics in English translation for purposes of comparative criticism. Nor can we afford to neglect Anglo-Indian, and Indo-Anglian literature. It has a special significance for Indian students."¹² Recently, at the National Workshop for Syllabus Reform in English held at Hyderabad, one delegate even suggested that translations of Indian classics like the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* should also be introduced in the English literature course. On top of it two eminent professors of English have recently suggested that an English Literature course should somehow be supplemented by a study of regional literatures. Prof. V. Y. Katak says: "Again, wouldn't it be possible to bring the teaching of English literature in alignment with the teaching of our other literatures so that the most intimate responses developed in contact with literature of one's own mother-tongue could provide a firmer basis for the longer effort called for in dealing with a foreign literature?"¹³

Prof. S. Nagarajan expects every student and teacher of English literature to take notice of regional literatures. Feeling quite annoyed at the present state of ignorance, he says: "Most English teachers, either because they are ignorant or because they are disdainful, refuse to take notice of the literatures in the regional languages even when they are relevant and appropriate to the task in hand (explaining, for instance, the nature of poetic imagery). Consequently, the response to English literature of both the teachers and their students tends to be imitative or derivative, and their enthusiasm for English literature testifies more to their powers of self-deception and auto-suggestion than to an authentic sensibility nurtured and strengthened by the study of a literature written in a language of which they can have an inward possession."¹⁴

The argument obviously is that one's regional literature gives one a better opportunity to train one's critical faculty, as there one has the advantage of having one's own language and cultural situation to deal with. But the question is: Are a foreign language and an alien cultural situation permanent barriers to a competent bilingual speaker who not only has a sufficient command of the foreign language whose literature he is studying, but has also a capacity to project himself into an alien cultural situation? The next question is: Does the knowledge of one's own literature necessarily improve one's ability to understand and judge a foreign literature? Has it been tested and proved? These are some inconvenient questions that have no easy answers. However, the issue is worth debating. Anyway, an interaction between a foreign and one's own literature would surely expose the learner to more than one tradition, and enhance his understanding and experience, although, as Prof. Kantak says, "the difficulties in realising this idea in terms of teaching procedures are immense." Finally, it is also suggested that a literature course should have a language component in which courses in the structure of the English language and, if possible, in the methodology of its teaching should be introduced. Surely, a course in the structure of the language would be useful, as it will help one understand more clearly how the language is used in literary discourse, and how it deviates from the common standard for special communicative purposes, but the methodology of language teaching seems to have no connection with a literature course. One could, however, add to the list a course in General and Literary Aesthetics, and another course in the History of Ideas, or the Socio-economic and Intellectual Background of the literature concerned.

After having set out various points of view regarding the selection of courses and their contents, it could be argued that any selection should largely depend on the objectives of the course, which we have clearly defined in the first section. It is, in fact, exposure to a large variety of representative works of varied complexity in each genre that is needed to provide a student sufficient experience and critical insight.

4. 2. Grading

The second component of method is grading. How should we grade a literature course, i.e. put something before something else? Are there any principles that may guide one in doing so? In language teaching, again, some tentative principles like structural simplicity, frequency, usefulness, teachability, clarity, capacity for expansion etc. have been suggested for grading of different kinds, so that, for example, anything that is structurally simpler or more useful or easier to teach, etc., comes before other things. Can we borrow some of these principles for grading a literature course? Surely,

structural simplicity and teachability, with a different focus, can serve as useful principles for grading literary texts, so that a poem that is structurally simpler or easier to teach on account of there being not many alien references and allusions or too subtle nuances can come before a more complex and allusion-ridden poem. A student can thus be led on gradually from the simpler to the more difficult. That can keep highly allusive poems like those of T. S. Eliot and others out for the time being, and simpler poems by other Moderns and earlier poets can come before. I am not arguing here for leaving out complex poems altogether. In fact, they can be juxtaposed against simpler poems for a fuller understanding of the subtleties of the poetic language and structure. But still a scale of increasing difficulty will be useful to have in a teaching programme. It will also help us decide how much we can expect from a student at a particular stage by way of interpretation and judgment. It is a highly delicate task to expose a student to texts of varying difficulty through a course, and develop his understanding and critical ability progressively through successive stages of his reading and experience.

It should be noticed that grading should always be of things of a particular type or category. Poetry, Drama, Fiction and literary theories should each have its own scheme of grading. The whole idea is that there should be some principled order in teaching anything, so that we may not take up anything any day for teaching in an erratic fashion. Truly speaking, it is a psychological question which we can conclusively answer only when we clearly understand how different scales of grading will have different values in terms of development of a student's understanding and critical ability.

4. 3. Presentation :

Mackey defines Presentation as "communicating something to somebody." In language teaching much depends on how the bit of the language to be taught is presented in the form of teaching materials, and, again, by the teacher in the classroom by various techniques. Even in presentation the aim of how best to develop the required communicative competence in the student is pursued throughout, and methods of presentation are evaluated with respect to that aim alone. Methods that do not successfully lead one on to the desired goal within a specified period of time are rejected, and better methods that can do so are devised. But, as has already been pointed out, such an evaluation is possible only when there is some way to measure the knowledge of the learner, achieved by means of a particular method, and compare it with that achieved by another method. The only reason for rejecting the Grammar-Translation method, and replacing it by the Audio-lingual method

was that the latter yielded better results in language teaching than the former. Now even the Audio-lingual method is found defective, as it does not develop in the learner the required communicative competence. All the hopes it had aroused once seem to have been dashed, and it is now argued by many that the method is based on a wrong concept of the nature of the subject i. e. language. So, again, there is a search for a better method. Some now suggest the cognitive method, and advocate a notional approach to both syllabus construction and teaching materials. Others do not approve of a wholly deductive approach to the question of methodology, and advocate a fine balance between the deductive and inductive approaches, believing that a language is not wholly a set of rules, but also a set of habits. Anyway, my only purpose in giving the language teaching analogy is to emphasize the fact that no one method is sacrosanct, and that, as people refine their goals, or have a better awareness of them, they start looking for more suitable methods to achieve them. The only test of validity is what a method achieves.

Translating all this in terms of literature teaching, we have to examine what the different existing methods I have mentioned in a previous section have achieved; that is to say, how best each one of them has helped a student acquire the ability to read, interpret and evaluate any literary text independently. Our discussion in that section led us to believe that the Practical Criticism Method, or the Peripatetic Method, used by the ancient philosopher in the Lyceum, was the most suitable method for that purpose, although one may not like to follow it to such an extremity that even the author's name and the date of publication are, like the historical background, and biographical information, considered irrelevant. Anything that helps in revealing the intention of a poem or any other kind of literary work should, in my view, be relevant. We need a practical criticism that is not tied up with the ideology of one school or another whose aims are too partial to do full justice to the richness of the texture and structure of a work of literary art.

We may now divide the task of literature teaching into two components: (1) The theory of literary criticism, and (2) the practice of literary criticism. These components obviously require different methods of presentation. But before discussing them, it would be proper to emphasize a general point about methodology, namely, that at the post-graduate stage the whole approach to teaching should be different from that at the under-graduate stage. I believe that this is not the stage where much teaching by lecture should take place. Lectures should mostly continue upto the under-graduate stage. It should be realized that the post-graduate stage is a mature stage where independent reading and discussion are more suitable for learning. The entire mode of

relationship between the teacher and the taught should be different at this stage. What is more relevant at this stage is a sense of participation in the pursuit of knowledge. This makes all the difference in the methods that suit this stage.

Coming back to the question of presentation, we find that any interpretation or evaluation of literature requires the students to have some kind of theoretical framework or a set of assumptions about a literary work, its quality and levels of excellence. They may be only inductive generalizations drawn from one's own readings, or some well-recognized norms. Without some theoretical concepts, or a set of values, it is impossible to interpret or evaluate any literary text. Now the question is where these concepts should be introduced. The right stage for that is the under-graduate stage where a whole course of lectures in the theory of literary interpretation and evaluation could be organized. In these lectures it could be clearly demonstrated how different concepts are relevant to the study of literary texts of different kinds. These lectures may at times take the shape of demonstration lessons where the teacher may first do what he expects his students to do later, i. e. apply different concepts to actual analysis. Besides that, there may be a course of lectures on the nature and function of literature, just to develop a general understanding of the subject. At the post-graduate level, then, there is very little need for lectures. All that is necessary is to give the students a select bibliography on the related topics. After they have read all, or most of the concerned books and papers, group discussions under the supervision of the teacher may be held. The teacher's main function should be to monitor such discussions; keep them as lively as possible, and at last to sum them up by filling up the gaps, if there are any. In these group meetings we could often have paper reading by the students, followed by discussion. These activities keep the students alert, and inspire them to read, think and work independently. They even train them to think systematically and argue cogently. This is the sort of training our post-graduate students badly need for achieving intellectual maturity, which alone can enable them to perform the tasks that lie before them. This will also bridge the wide gap that is often found today between the post-graduate and the research (Ph. D.) stage at our universities.

Now as far as the other component of the literature course, i. e. the practice of literary criticism, is concerned, it involves a necessary skill to analyse, interpret and evaluate a literary work. For that training in some basic analytical procedures may be necessary, but it should be stressed here that literary criticism is not merely a matter of skill, howsoever, refined. More than skill, it requires individual insight, which can be developed only by a great deal of

exposure and experience. A sharp intellect and a fertile imagination are also required to provide deep insight into the inner design and structure of a poem, play or novel. It is through insight alone that the communicative function of each component of a literary work can be perceived, and the whole complex of formal and semantic relationships be grasped. Even things like stylistic analysis, where people apply statistical procedures to count exactly the frequency of each foregrounded feature, cannot be properly handled without insight a sense of relevance. Criticism is not merely a matter of pigeonholing different features into classes and making statements of frequency, but that of relating all such features to the meaning and communicative purpose of the work. So, in fact, competence to analyse a work of art and to interpret all the relevant parts of it in order to perceive its total structure and meaning is the thing a student of literature requires. He may have to learn it by trial and error, or inference and guesswork, as Richards says, "Inference and guesswork! What else is interpretation? How, apart from inference and skillful guesswork, can we be supposed to understand a writer's or speaker's thought?"¹⁵ A student needs to explore as many interpretative possibilities of a literary work as possible to capture the multiplicity of its meaning. Literary discourse has 'a kind of semantic thickness' when compared with technical discourse, and various levels of meaning, working together in it, give it a degree of complexity that can be unfolded only by means of great ingenuity and imagination.¹⁶ But one should never forget that each literary work is unique in several respects and requires special treatment. Bruce Pattison warns us, "If our literature lessons are falling into a regular pattern, there must be something wrong with our teaching. The ways we read and the ways we discuss various works must differ widely to be true to the individual characters of the works themselves."¹⁷

However, the question now is whether lectures can fulfil the requirement laid down above. I think nothing other than group discussions, workshops, seminars and practical criticism sessions can provide adequate grounding in the practical task of literary criticism. I fully agree here with Geoffrey Bullough, who says: "Critical analysis may be demonstrated before a large audience but its proper development necessitates discussion of student interpretations and assessments of subtle detail, which can be made only in small groups of not more than eight people."¹⁸

As Bullough has rightly remarked, this kind of activity should go on all through the year, so that from their day-to-day experience the students may continuously develop their competence in literary criticism. It will enable them to read literary works of different kinds with far greater interest and understanding than is the case today even after they have taken a Ph.D. degree in literature.

THE QUESTION OF METHODOLOGY IN THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE

If they intend to be teachers of literature they will all the more require such a training, as without that it is impossible to continue in the profession.¹⁹

Now the outline of the method for teaching literature that I have tried to present above may be questioned on purely administrative grounds, as this raises questions of staffing, hours and rooms in institutions which cannot easily work a practical criticism or seminar system. But it cannot be an argument against the method which alone, in my view, can achieve the aims of teaching literature. I may now conclude by saying that with a proper approach and method, reading or teaching literature can be one of the greatest sources of intellectual pleasure, and one of the most rewarding activities of academic life.

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Notes and References

1. F. R. Leavis, *Education and the University*, Chatto and Windus Ltd., 1972, p. 34.
2. *Ibid*, p. 34.
3. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, Penguin Books (1949) 1956, p. 243.
4. F. R. Leavis, *Education and the University*, Chatto and Windus Ltd., 1972, p. 70.
5. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' Faber and Faber Ltd., London, (1932) 1972, p. 13-22.
6. Pit Corder, *Introducing Applied Linguistics*, Penguin, 1973, p. 355:

"If we want to evaluate some aspect of the 'teacher' e.g. the teaching method, then we get two teachers matched in all possible respects except the method they use, to teach two matched sorts of learners at the beginning and end of the course and compare the results to find out the amounts learned by each set, and then compare the two results. In such a case the dependent variable is 'the teaching method' and the independent variables, 'the learner' and, 'the materials.' But the only measurement in the experiment after setting it up is that of the learner's knowledge of the language."

7. Geoffrey Bullough, *ELT Selections I* 'Analytic Criticism in Literary Study,' OUP, 1967, p. 182.
8. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* 'The Function of Criticism,' Faber and Faber Ltd., London, (1932) 1972, p. 32.

"But it is fairly certain that 'interpretation' (I am not touching upon the accoustic element in literature) is only legitimate when it is not interpretation at all, but merely

putting the reader in possession of facts which he would otherwise have missed. I have had some experience of Extension lecturing, and I have found only two ways of leading any pupils to like anything with the right liking: to present them with a selection of the simpler kind of facts about a work—its conditions, its setting, its genesis—or else to spring the work on them in such a way that they were not prepared to be prejudiced against it."

9. P. P. Sharma, *Newsletter No. 21* 'How to read a Novel' – Some Suggestions, CIEFL.
10. W. F. Mackey, *ELT Selections 2*, 'The Meaning of Method,' OUP, 1967, p. 10.
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12. V. K. Gokak, *English in India - Its Present and Future*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1964, p. 140.
13. V. Y. Kantak, *CIEFL Bulletin*, Vol. 12, 'The Future of English Studies,' 1976, p. 44.
14. S. Nagarajan, *CIEFL Bulletin*, Vol. 12, 'University Departments of English and the Formation of A Literary Public in India,' 1976, P. 51.
15. I. A. Richards, *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, OUP, New York, 1950, p. 53.
16. Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, Harcourt Brace & World Inc., New York, 1950, pp. 114-64.
17. Bruce Pattison, *ELT Selections 1*, 'Some Notes on the Teaching of Literature,' pp. 179-80.
18. Geoffrey Bullough, *ELT Selections 1*, 'Analytic Criticism in Literary Study,' p. 186.
19. Flora J. Arnstein, 'The Teacher's Dilemma' in *Poetry in the Elementary Classroom*, The National Council of Teachers of English, London, 1962, p. 8:

"One of the most frequent questions teachers ask me is 'How can one teach poetry when one has insufficient background in it oneself?' Understandably this situation seems almost impossible to resolve. Teachers know only too well that they will not be able to instil in their pupils an interest in poetry if they possess none themselves. The answer is no immutable law requiring that they continue without interest in poetry."